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Title : Beaching by wild bottlenose dolphins in Shark Bay, Western Australia

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Abstract : Thirteen different foraging strategies have been identified for wild bottlenose dolphins (Tursiops sp.) in Shark Bay, Western Australia. One of these strategies is beaching, in which dolphins swim fast parallel to the shore in approximately 1 m or less of water and often surge out onto the beach to catch a single fish. Rare in this population and others, this behavior has only been observed on 3 beaches in the area of study. Only 4 individuals have been observed beaching inshore, including 2 mothers and 2 other adult females. One of the mothers has been observed beaching since 1991. A calf of a beaching mother was observed shallow-water foraging but did not fully beach (i.e. did not come fully out of the water). These animals preferentially associate both inshore in the shallow waters and offshore. In 1999, 2001, and 2002, 28 hr of focal follow observations were conducted on 2 mothers and 3 calves; 21 hr were conducted via land-based observations from shore, and 7 hr were boat-based. The majority of time spent inshore does not involve foraging, and shallow-water foraging and beaching tend to occur as brief bouts. When offshore, the mothers were observed engaging in other foraging techniques widely used by dolphins. Scans were also conducted from cliffs for 96 hr on 19 days in 2002. Presence or absence of dolphins in defined inshore areas was determined every 15 minutes, as well as the number and identities of animals when possible. Of 400 scans, dolphins were present in the inshore shallows 45% of the time. Of 104 scans in which the identities of all dolphins could be determined, 24% included at least one dolphin that has not been observed beaching. Given the rarity of the behavior and the possibility of matrilineal transmission, beaching may involve social learning.